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ABSTRACT

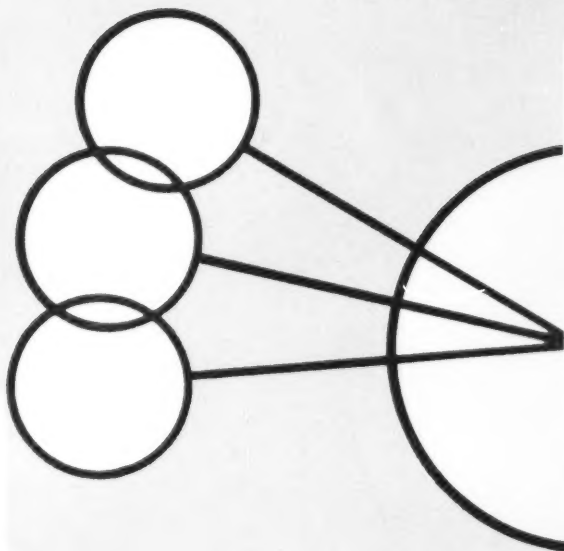
Improving the quality of education is difficult today when many schools are experiencing a steady decline in student enrollment and financial resources. In such a climate it is increasingly important to stretch resources and adjust programs to provide for the diverse needs of all students. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has developed a process model for reducing curriculum while maintaining the elements essential for educational quality. This guide for curricular analysis and decision-making is intended to give direction to principals and school communities in setting curricular priorities, making reductions, and finding alternatives. Since cutbacks in courses or programs are almost always controversial, great emphasis is placed on the quality and scope of information, the establishment of criteria, and the opportunity to hear all viewpoints. Course-rating sheets for students, departments, and committee members are appended to the guide. (Author/MLF)

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Reducing The Curriculum

A Process Model



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A TASK FORCE REPORT

Reducing the Curriculum

A Process Model

Prepared by a
Task Force
of
The National Association
of
Secondary School Principals

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Foreword

The National Association of Secondary School Principals shares with secondary school principals a strong commitment to improving the quality of education. Improving education's quality, however, is difficult today when many schools are experiencing a steady decline in student enrollment and financial resources. School leaders more than ever before must make educationally sound decisions about existing curricular offerings. In such a climate, it is increasingly important to stretch resources and adjust programs to provide for the diverse needs of all students.

The NASSP Board of Directors, at the recommendation of its standing Curriculum Committee, appointed a task force to develop a process model for reducing curriculum while maintaining the elements essential for educational quality.

The task force has approached this assignment with one fundamental principle in mind: quality education. Reducing curriculum is, at best, a painful and tedious endeavor. The task force presents a guide for curricular analysis and decision making that is intended to give direction to principals and school communities in setting curricular priorities, in making reductions, and in finding alternatives.

Every school and district is unique. The process developed by the task force will be most effective in dealing with any necessary reduction of curriculum if it is modified and adapted in the light of local needs.

The NASSP extends its gratitude to members of the Special Task Force and its Review Panel for a remarkably coherent and useful report.

Scott D. Thomson
Executive Director
NASSP

Introduction

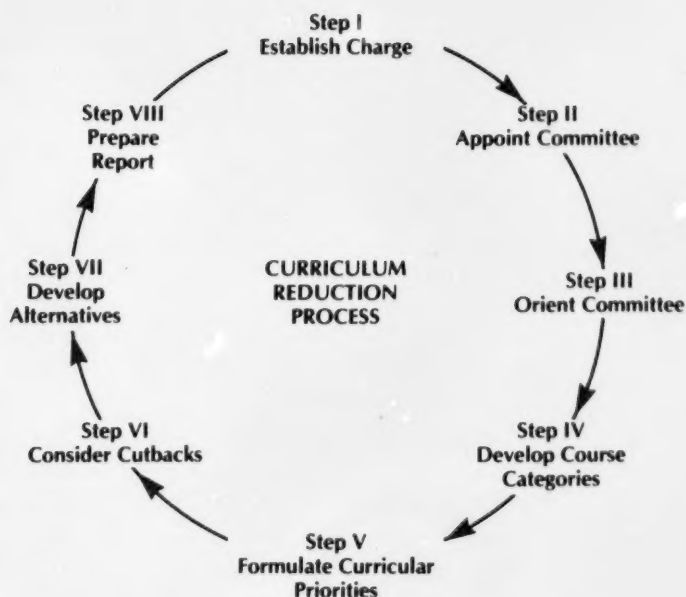
Even in the face of declining enrollment and diminishing financial support to schools, the task force believes that great effort must be made to provide quality education for all students. Its members undertook the development of a process for reducing curricular offerings with the optimistic view that determined educational and community leaders can resolve the most difficult issues. The task force, in presenting this blueprint for action, urges a strong school-community partnership. Quality decisions are the product of planning and process.

When the need to reduce curriculum in the secondary school is evident, the task force recommends a plan of eight sequential steps. This plan will serve as a systematic guide and as a foundation for community, staff, and board support of decisions that must be made. Since cutbacks in courses or programs are almost always controversial, great emphasis is placed on the quality and scope of information, establishment of criteria, and the opportunity to hear all viewpoints. These components, the task force believes, lead to decisions that focus on the school's goals rather than the demands of single-interest groups.

The task force takes the position that new problems—especially those that reflect long-term trends—require solutions that may involve some risk-taking and creativity on the part of educational leaders. In light of this, the task force provides some alternatives to consider when it becomes necessary to reduce significant courses or programs.

A Step-by-Step Procedure for Program Analysis and Decision Making

The task force recommends that eight steps be followed in reviewing district/school programs and courses for possible cutbacks.



Step I: **ESTABLISHING THE CHARGE.** The governing body must mandate a charge and clearly define it in writing. The charge should include:

- A statement of the task;
- Assignment of the task to a committee, with guidelines specifying how members are to be selected;
- Delineation of committee authority;
- A target date for the committee to present the final report to the superintendent or the governing board.

Step II: **APPOINTING THE COMMITTEE.** The chief executive officer of the school district in consultation with the building principal(s), or the principal alone in a nonpublic school, should appoint the committee and its chairperson.

- The chairperson should be a local school administrator skilled in conducting group meetings and knowledgeable in curriculum.
- Committee should include members representing a broad spectrum of the school-community population (students, staff, parents, and interested community persons), representing diverse philosophical points of view.

Step III: **ORIENTING THE COMMITTEE.** At the first meeting of the committee, the formal charge should be delivered personally by the district superintendent or an officer of the governing board. Written copies of the charge should be available so that all interested parties begin with the same understanding of the governing board's expectations.

Clarification of issues and information gathering should be encouraged during this orientation period. Substantive information about the school and curriculum should be distributed to the committee, including:

- Basic demographic information on the school/district:
 - ✓ Name of the school and the grade configuration.
 - ✓ Past, present, and projected enrollment figures.
 - ✓ Graduation requirements.
 - ✓ Program of studies.
 - ✓ Summary of school standardized achievement test results.
 - ✓ Postgraduate follow-up data.
 - ✓ District's legal responsibilities and mandates.
 - ✓ Pertinent negotiated contract provisions; i.e., class size, etc.
- Current statement of district/school philosophy and objectives.

Step IV: DEVELOPING COURSE CATEGORIES. The committee should review the information provided in Step III and formulate a set of course categories. While the committee may wish to develop and name its own categories, the task force recommends three levels of priority:

Priority #1—Essential. Mandated courses that are essential to the achievement of district/school goals and objectives.

This category includes courses required by law, by board policy, or by an accrediting agency.

Priority #2—Desirable. Courses fulfilling postsecondary admission requirements or career goals, satisfying high level student interest, and/or having strong community support. These courses would ordinarily be taught depending on sufficient staff and student enrollment.

Priority #3—Specialized. Courses that are offered if funding is available. These include highly specialized electives, courses available through other services in the community, etc. If funding is available, these courses might be taught irrespective of student enrollment.

Step V: FORMULATING THE CURRICULAR PRIORITIES. Concomitant with thoughtfully formulated criteria for the evaluation of courses and programs, the committee must also establish a common basis for placement of courses in these categories. The committee should anticipate the consequences of all proposed subject or program reductions. Several questions should be asked about any proposed reduction.

How will the reduction affect:

- Student learning, achievement, and growth?
- The implementation of established objectives in the district/school?
- The balance of courses/programs in the curriculum?
- Teacher and student morale or school climate (i.e., "old favorite" courses)?
- The needs of particular student groups (i.e., seniors, handicapped, gifted, etc.)?
- The utilization of existing materials, equipment, facilities, and community resources?
- The total cost of offering the program (i.e., will reduction increase administrative cost, demand reorganization, etc.)?

Step VI: CONSIDERING THE CUTBACKS. The committee should ask each department to present its courses of study. The committee should review all courses in the light of the established priorities and place them in the appropriate category.

- The departments should be encouraged to utilize student feedback and a summary evaluation in making reports to the committee. (See Appendices A and B for sample forms.)
- The committee should devise a form for rating each course. (See Appendix C for a sample course rating form.)
- The committee should then deliberate on the department reports and course ratings to place the programs in priority categories. More than one round of discussion may be necessary at this stage.

Step VII: **DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES.** The reduction of course offerings may adversely affect the quality of the school's instructional program. Faced with this dilemma, schools/districts will need to explore new avenues to maintain programs that fulfill the school's goals and objectives. The committee should reexamine the utilization of existing resources and the availability of alternative funding or resources. Alternatives might include:

- Seeking federal/foundation/business funding and cooperation.
- Establishing fees for some programs/courses (if legal).
- Providing credit and enrichment activities through community colleges and other accredited institutions.
- Providing credit for independent study.
- Providing credit for evening and summer school courses.
- Establishing cooperative course offerings among area schools and/or districts, including both public and private institutions.
- Exploring the use of differentiated staffing patterns and large-group instruction (for more efficient utilization of existing staff).
- Offering certain courses in alternate years.
- Combining advanced course levels in the same subject area.
- Offering specialized topics in mini-courses or seminars.
- Utilizing more effective media instruction.
- Developing and utilizing subject area resource centers as instructional stations.
- Implementing individually paced learning programs.
- Utilizing volunteers and college interns as staff assistants.

Step VIII: **PREPARING THE FINAL REPORT.** A preliminary summary of committee recommendations should be developed.

- Copies of the summary should be distributed to the professional staff and the public.

- An open meeting should be held to receive comments from the staff and community.
- Following the open hearing, the committee should prepare a final draft of recommendations.
- The final report should be given to the chief executive officer, who in turn should submit it to the governing board with recommendations for action.

Appendix A

Student Questionnaire for Course Evaluation

This questionnaire will allow you to evaluate the course in which you are now enrolled. It is your opportunity for input and constructive criticism. Read questions carefully and answer them honestly. If you choose, you may sign your name. Comments are encouraged but not required.

COURSE: _____ Grade Level(s) _____

PART I:

Each question below is followed by the numbers 1-4. Circle the number you feel most closely answers the question. Use the following guide in considering your answers.

- 1) NOT AT ALL
- 2) TO A VERY LIMITED EXTENT
- 3) TO SOME EXTENT
- 4) TO A GREAT DEGREE

1. Did the course stimulate your interest to further your study, either here or beyond high school? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

2. Was the material presented in an organized manner? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

3. Have you learned what you hoped to learn in this class? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

4. Do you think too much information was presented in this course? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

5. Do you think too little information was offered in this course? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

6. Did this course stimulate curiosity and creativity on your part? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

7. Do you feel you have improved your note-taking skills in this course? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

8. Do you feel the course presented information that you can use in everyday life? 1 2 3 4

Comment: _____

9. I believe this course will benefit me in the future as a:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| a) college student | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b) employee/worker | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c) citizen in society | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d) good consumer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e) patron of the arts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f) parent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Comment: _____

PART II

10. If you could take the course again, what would you like to see changed? Kept the same?

11. What areas of the subject matter gave you the most trouble? Which the least?

12. Rank the following teaching methods in order of your *personal preference* (1 through 8)

_____ audiovisual offerings	_____ lectures
_____ class discussions	_____ oral reports
_____ independent work	_____ small-group discussions
_____ lab work	_____ tests

13. Evaluate the instructional methods used during the course. Use check marks to indicate your answers.

	<i>Too Much</i>	<i>Just Right</i>	<i>Too Little</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
Audiovisual offerings	_____	_____	_____	_____
Class discussions	_____	_____	_____	_____
Independent work	_____	_____	_____	_____
Lab work	_____	_____	_____	_____
Lectures	_____	_____	_____	_____
Oral reports	_____	_____	_____	_____
Small-group discussions	_____	_____	_____	_____
Tests	_____	_____	_____	_____

14. On a scale of 1-5 (low to high) rank the teacher in terms of each of the following: Circle your answer.

Sensitivity to students	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of subject	1	2	3	4	5
Effectiveness of teaching	1	2	3	4	5
Fairness in evaluation of students	1	2	3	4	5

15. Overall, I would rate the educational value of this course as (please circle):

1. Poor
2. Fair
3. Good
4. Excellent

Readers may duplicate this form for use in their schools.

Appendix B

Department—Course Rating Sheet

The department should complete this form for *each course* and present it to the Committee at the time of its report.

Name of Course	Evaluator
Department	Date

Please circle your responses, #4 "Satisfies the criteria completely" to #1 "Does not satisfy the criteria." N/A = Not Applicable.

A. Level of Appropriateness

1. Conforms to district philosophy of education	4	3	2	1	N/A
2. Conforms to school philosophy of education	4	3	2	1	N/A
3. Fulfills state and/or local school district requirements	4	3	2	1	N/A
4. Meets accrediting association minimum standards	4	3	2	1	N/A
5. Meets the needs of the learner (psychological, physical, and/or intellectual)	4	3	2	1	N/A
6. Meets the needs of the community (parents, area business community, district residents)	4	3	2	1	N/A
7. Is considered integral to the mastery of the discipline by appropriate subject matter experts from outside the school district (i.e., subject matter associations, university departments, state education departments, etc.)	4	3	2	1	N/A
8. Meets the requirements of the scope and sequence	4	3	2	1	N/A
9. Meets requirements for admission to institutions of higher education and/or other postsecondary training programs	4	3	2	1	N/A
10. Other _____	4	3	2	1	N/A
Summary	4	3	2	1	N/A

B. Content Validity

1. Written course goals are available	4	3	2	1	N/A
2. Written course objectives are available	4	3	2	1	N/A
3. Curriculum materials (texts, films, written handouts) relate to course goals and objectives	4	3	2	1	N/A
4. Scope and sequence relate to course goals and objectives	4	3	2	1	N/A
5. Instruction relates to course goals and objectives	4	3	2	1	N/A
6. Course contributes to the development of the larger subject matter discipline to which it belongs (It sequentially relates to other courses offered in the same department, but does not duplicate or extensively overlap other offerings)	4	3	2	1	N/A
7. Provides an introduction to a broad discipline	4	3	2	1	N/A
8. Is an advanced course (a continuation of an introductory or beginning course)	4	3	2	1	N/A
9. Serves as a prerequisite to other advanced courses and/or programs	4	3	2	1	N/A
10. Admits students selectively based on a specific set of criteria	4	3	2	1	N/A
11. Other _____	4	3	2	1	N/A
Summary	4	3	2	1	N/A

C. Course Effectiveness

1. Students successfully completing course have acquired <i>basic</i> skills in reading, writing, and/or computation	4	3	2	1	N/A
2. Students successfully completing course have acquired or refined skills that can be used to earn a living and/or that have personal utility for life	4	3	2	1	N/A
3. Students successfully completing course have acquired knowledge, skills, and/or appreciations prerequisite to advanced studies	4	3	2	1	N/A
4. Students successfully completing course have acquired an appreciation for the subject matter	4	3	2	1	N/A

5. Other _____	4	3	2	1	N/A
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Summary	4	3	2	1	N/A
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D. Resource Availability

1. Qualified teacher(s)	4	3	2	1	N/A
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2. Qualified support staff (aides, coordinator, etc.)	4	3	2	1	N/A
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3. Required texts/supplies/equipment	4	3	2	1	N/A
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4. Necessary facilities	4	3	2	1	N/A
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5. Other _____	4	3	2	1	N/A
----------------	---	---	---	---	-----

Summary	4	3	2	1	N/A
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E. Type of Budgetary Support

1. Federal	4	3	2	1	N/A
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2. State	4	3	2	1	N/A
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3. Local	4	3	2	1	N/A
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4. Private	4	3	2	1	N/A
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5. Other _____	4	3	2	1	N/A
----------------	---	---	---	---	-----

Summary	4	3	2	1	N/A
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General Summary Rating of Course

4	3.5	3	2.5	2	1.5	1
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Notes:

Readers may duplicate this form for use in their schools.

Appendix C

Committee—Course Evaluation Sheet

Committee members complete this form *for each course* to guide the discussion in establishing priority among courses.

Name of Course: _____ Grade Level(s) _____

Course Program is (please circle)

Relative Value of Course to
Curriculum (please circle)

- a. Mandated by law
- b. Local graduation requirement
- c. Required by accrediting agency
- d. Elective—traditional favorite
- e. Elective—specialized

- 1. Poor
- 2. Fair
- 3. Good
- 4. Excellent

A. *Level of Appropriateness*

B. *Content Validity*

C. *Course Effectiveness*

D. *Available Resources*

E. *Type of Budgetary Support*

NOTES:

Readers may duplicate this form for use in their schools.